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SUBJECT: 2009 Colombian Demobilization Rates Down, Yet More
Experienced Insurgents Increasingly Surrendering

Summary

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Colombia's robust Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) policy continues to bear fruit late into 2009 primarily due to several years of sustained security operations. Yet, after high rates in 2007 and 2008, a natural leveling off is evident with demobilization slowing by more than 20%. Encouragingly, countermeasures implemented by illegal groups have not prevented a strong upswing in quality since 2007, with twice as many mid-level leaders laying down arms. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) has intensified efforts against illegal recruitment by incorporating it into the demobilization strategy for implementation in 2010. MOD budget shortfalls stalled some program efforts during the first half of the year, but most large, important contracts have since been awarded through mid-2010. Efforts are underway to modernize the Programa de Atencion Humanitaria al Desmovilizado (PAHD) information technology (IT) infrastructure, analytical capabilities and positive identification through biometrics. Future DDR success depends largely on sustaining or improving existing DDR policies and Colombia's ability to persuade its neighbors to collaborate. END SUMMARY.

52,000 in Seven Years

¶2. (SBU) Colombia's DDR policy continues to bear fruit late into 2009, primarily due to several years of sustained military and police operations under the Democratic Security Policy. Since 2002, the MOD has transitioned 20,398 fighters into society via the individual demobilization program, PAHD, while using the information volunteered about illegal organizations to further tear down such groups. PAHD candidates historically include paramilitaries from groups like the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) or insurgents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of

Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN). While 31,671 of the AUC demobilized in a collective process under the High Commissioner for Peace, 3,682 demobilized individually until the statute of limitations ran out for paramilitary groups in December 2006. The Ministry of Defense welcomes demobilized fighters and their immediate family to one of 29 homes in six major cities where they receive meals, new clothes, psychological assistance and a modest transportation stipend. Once certified by an interagency committee they transition to the High Commission for Reintegration (ACR) for continued assistance while participating in reintegration activities. Assistance includes psychological therapy, education, job training, small business development and a monthly living stipend equivalent to Colombian minimum wage.

Down but Not Out

¶3. (SBU) The PAHD is experiencing a natural leveling off after the extraordinarily high demobilization rates in 2007 and 2008, including a peak enrollment in 2008 when 3,461 insurgents demobilized. These dramatic increases strongly correlated to areas under sustained military pressure, especially when combined with desertion, capture, or death of insurgent leaders. Reduced pressure and a lack of major psychological blows may lower the

motivation to desert, but a more important factor is an increased tendency for insurgents to avoid direct contact with security forces and withdrawal to more remote areas. The COLMIL has had fewer direct engagements with the FARC, and according to the PAHD in 2009. One of the most common reasons cited for desertion is military pressure. The isolation of would-be deserters combined with less frequent engagements reduces their opportunities to escape. As of November 30, 2009, the program has demobilized 2,481 individuals. To date, FARC demobilization numbers are short of last year's total of 3,027, but ELN demobilization numbers are already a record 470 plus.

Counter-measures Implemented to Prevent Desertion

¶4. (SBU) The MOD has uncovered evidence of demobilization "counter-measures" through testimony and the examination of captured FARC computers. Examples of reported counter-measures include limiting contact with the local populace, separation of FARC couples, prohibiting the use of radios, and execution of those caught or accused of attempts at desertion.

¶5. (SBU) In response to FARC counter-measures, the MOD created tactical demobilization positions throughout the Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O) area of operations and other tailor-made demobilization initiatives. For example, the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander department employs a custom communications strategy designed to take advantage of a local FARC leader's tendency to abuse his personnel.

Insurgency Losing More of Its Leaders to Desertion

¶6. (SBU) A steady increase in the quality of demobilization candidates began in 2007. The number of experienced combatants and

mid-level leaders demobilizing has doubled each year, indicating more seasoned combatants are no longer convinced that their "cause" is just and creating a leadership void difficult to fill with inexperienced recruits. ACR education and training programs have been refitted to match this increasingly significant demographic.

Anti-Recruitment Efforts to Stem Flow

¶ 17. (SBU) The MOD has redoubled efforts against illegal recruitment by incorporating it into the demobilization strategy and combining it with communications initiatives as well as special events for high risk populations. Design, coordination and funding of the strategy have been accomplished this year and include plans for full implementation in 2010. Successful anti-recruitment efforts would potentially break the cycle of violence and prompt arrival at a post-conflict scenario.

Budget Ready for 2010

¶ 18. (SBU) The PAHD was not immune to large MOD budget shortfalls in early 2009; however they were able to sustain critical operations such as humanitarian assistance to the demobilized. Communications and rewards for information and war material were hit hardest. The program was unable to execute contracts with private media outlets for the first half of the year or to pay demobilized fighters for information and material surrendered in a timely manner. In anticipation of potential budget shortages in 2010 and the unknowns associated with an administration change, large contracts for demobilized housing, psychological assistance and communications initiatives were awarded through mid-2010.

Database, Biometrics and Analysis Capabilities Upgraded

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¶ 19. (SBU) Our efforts to modernize the PAHD information technology (IT) infrastructure, analytical capabilities and positive identification through biometrics will be completed in early 2010. Information from those demobilized is one of the best sources of intelligence available to security forces, but thus far the volumes of data have not realized their full potential. In addition to internal program benefits, such as paperless management processes and dramatically improved information security, the system will facilitate a more effective transition from the PAHD to the Reintegration phase.

Comment

¶ 10. (SBU) Looking ahead two to three years after the demobilization or displacement of the majority of insurgents in Colombian territory, the most serious challenges for the PAHD will be the demobilization of insurgents who have found refuge in neighboring countries, and the prevention of illegal recruitment by criminal groups involved in drug trafficking (BACRIM). Two potential strategies to deal with these problems include a Regional Demobilization Workshop led by Colombia using cooperation between

the Governments of Panama and Colombia as a model, and dramatically increased efforts against recruitment by criminal groups complimented by nation-wide, U.S. supported consolidation efforts such as the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI). End Comment.

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